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Author(s): Charles G. Leland

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CHILDREN'S RHYMES AND INCANTATIONS.

VERY recently, while engaged in writing in Budapest on ancient incantations and their relics, as found in charms and doggerel songs, I read the very interesting article by Dr. H. Carrington Bolton, avowing his belief that the "counting-out rhymes" of children are the survivals of sortileges or divinations by lot. He remarks that he has, however, been able only in one instance to directly connect a child's counting-out rhyme with a magic spell. "According to Leland," he says, "the rhyme beginning with

One-ry, two-ery, ickery, Ann,

is a Gypsy magic spell in the Romany language."

I think that I can add to this two other instances of what are, to say the least, very remarkable coincidences of songs and spells. Most people know the song of one John Brown, who had "Ten little, nine little, eight little, seven little, six little Indian boys,"¹ and of the various fates which overtook them, inevitable as the decrees of Nemesis. It is also to be observed that after counting them all down to *none*, the song goes back and returns to ten again.

This song is really a game, and I have seen it played as one. Oddly enough, I have met with two separate Romany versions of it, but suppose them to be merely translations of the English song. But in Romany, as in most languages, there have existed what may be called additive and subtractive magic songs, based on some primitive Pythagorean principle of the virtues of numbers, or reducing a disease by counting it off. Now, in the charms given by Marcellus Burdigalensis, a Gallo-Roman of the fifth century ("Ueber Marcellus Burdigalensis," by Jacob Grimm, Berlin, 1849), there is a magical song for curing pains or disorders in the throat or jaws (*remedium valde certum et utile faucium doloribus*), with evident reference to the tonsils, known as *glandulæ*. This is the incantation of the "Novem Glandulæ Sorores," which the ancient doctor describes as "a wonderful song," in which opinion the lover of folk-lore will heartily concur.

CARMEN MIRUM AD GLANDULAS.

Glandulas mane carminabis, si dies minuatur, si nox ad vesperam, et digito medicinali ac pollice continens eas dices : —

Novem glandulæ sorores,
Octo glandulæ sorores,

¹ This song, which, with its air, is old in the United States (I remember hearing it in 1847), has been vulgarized, in England, at least of late, by being turned into ten little *nigger* boys.

Septem glandulæ sorores,
 Sex glandulæ sorores,
 Quinque glandulæ sorores,
 Quatuor glandulæ sorores,
 Tres glandulæ sorores,
 Duæ glandulæ sorores,
 Una glandula soror !

Novem fiunt glandulæ,
 Octo fiunt glandulæ,
 Septem fiunt glandulæ,
 Sex fiunt glandulæ,
 Quinque fiunt glandulæ,
 Quatuor fiunt glandulæ,
 Tres fiunt glandulæ,
 Duæ fiunt glandulæ,
 Una fit glandula,
 Nulla fit glandula !

It rises before us as we read — a chorus of rosy little Romans, bouncing Auluses and Marcelluses, Clodiuses and Manliuses, screaming together : Nine little, eight little, seven little, six little, five little, four little, three little, two little acorn girls ! until they were reduced to *una glandula et nulla* — “ then there was none.” They had heard their elders repeat it as a charm against sore throat, — and can any one doubt that they at once applied it to the wild witchcraft of fun and the sublime sorcery of sport, which are as wonderful in their way as anything in all theurgia or occultism. In any case, the song of the “ Nine Little Acorn Girls ” is very like that of the “ Ten Little Indians.”

There appears to lie in this formula a confusion or affinity between *glandulæ*, meaning tonsils, and the same word as applied to acorns. As is often the case, the similarity of name, based on a resemblance, caused an opinion that there must be “ sympathetic ” curative qualities. Judging by other “ cures,” I infer from the mention of number that nine real acorns were used in the incantation.

There is another nursery rhyme, which I think is applied to counting-out. If I am wrong, Dr. Bolton can correct me. It is as follows :—

Snail, snail, come out of your hole,
 Or else I ’ll beat you as black as a coal !
 Snail, snail, put out your head,
 Or else I ’ll kill you till you are dead !

This rhyme ran originally, —

Mole, mole, come out of your hole,

as appears from the very obvious rhyme, the fact that snails do not live in holes, and finally, because it is a version of a French nursery rhyme. But according to De Gubernatis (“ *La Mythologie des*

Plantes," vol. ii. p. 296), this was originally in the Department of the Orne an incantation "to drive away the evil spirits who attack apples and pears," sung while burning the moss from the trunk and branches : —

Taupes et mulots, sortez de mon enclos,
Ou je vous brûlerai la barbe et les os,
Bonjour les rois, jusqu'à douze mois,
Douze mois passés, rois, revenez.
Charge, pommier ! charge, poirier !
A chaque petite branchette,
Toute pleine ma grande pochette.

According to Du Cange, only the first two lines were sung, with a different ceremony. De Gubernatis, I find, in his "Zoölogical Mythology," settles the question by declaring that "the mole and snail are (in folk-lore) of the same nature as the gray mouse," and cites five Italian versions of the snail song, with one German form, in connection with the mole, so that there can be little doubt that the snail song and that of the mole are the same. The original may possibly exist in early Latin or in Celtic. Doctor Marcellus transferred many charms from the Gaulish or Celtic into his own tongue, and Grimm has interpreted them by the aid of Irish.

It had often occurred to me that the common rhyme, —

One, two, three, four, five,
I caught a hare alive ;
Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,
I let her go again,

must be a spell. By a strange chance, while thinking on this very subject, I opened "*Marcellus Burdigalensis*," and found that to effect a certain cure for divers diseases, we must, like the cook in Mrs. Glasse's receipts, "First catch your hare," and after plucking some of the down from its belly, "*ipsum vivum dimittis*," "let her go again." The hare acts as a scapegoat for "the sin of illness," for "*sublata lana leporem vivum dimittas, et dicas ei, dum dimittis eum*," —

Fuge, fuge, lepuscula, et tecum aufer coli dolorem !"

It has been observed that counting forms the basis of both the children's rhymes in question, and of a great number of witch-spells. Hence, children who live where such spells are daily repeated, whenever an accident occurs, or something unlucky passes by, soon pick them up. With this in mind, I very recently asked a professional fortune-teller, a woman, native of the Tuscan Romagna, and one who is intimate with the mysterious college of witches and wizards of that strange country (and who has a passion for collecting spells and charms), whether she thought that children's counting-out or summoning rhymes had anything in common with incantations. She caught

the idea at once, and illustrated it by remarking that, as in spells or sorcery, we summon those whom we bewitch, one by one, by name, so it is in children's rhymes, and to illustrate it, she sang to a very pretty air the following : —

Ecco l'imbasciatore !
 Col tua le vi la lera —
 Cosa volete col tua la li la,
 Col tua le li va la ?

Voglio la Cesarina,
 Col tua le li va la,
 Voglio la Armida, etc.

So she proceeded to call la Gesualda, Barbera, Bianca, Fortunata, Uliva, Filomena, Maddalena, Pia, Gemma, Ida, Lorenzina, Carolina, Annunciatina, and Margo.

It must certainly be admitted that if all these resemblances between old counting-out rhymes and incantations are mere coincidences, they are at least very extraordinary.

Charles G. Leland.

FLORENCE, ITALY.